

(II.iv.361). However, Salome herself has little time to devote to obsolete fixations with honour and reputation: ‘Why stand I now / On honourable points? ’Tis long ago / Since shame was written on my tainted brow’ (I.vi.281–3).

Despite the rumours of his death, Herod returns to Jerusalem to confront a court wholly given over to conspiracies and betrayal. If we fail to encounter the awesome tyrant we have been led to believe has ruled this kingdom with an iron grip, Cary’s often rather clownish Herod responds to his own sense of wild disorientation and the reality of political crisis with a suitably stunted vocabulary of violence. The painful inadequacy of his political and emotional understanding is made clear when he insists that the erring Mariam must be silenced with an axe. Most perplexingly, she meets this fate after being decried in public by her own mother: ‘She told her that her death was too too good, / And that already she had liv’d too long’ (V.i.41–2). Excluded from the world of classical heroism which Babas’ sons are allowed to inhabit as political traitors executed by the state, Mariam’s death is finally articulated through a Christian (indeed Christological) discourse of martyrdom: “‘By three days hence, if wishes could revive, / I know himself would make me oft alive’” (V.i.77–8). The grandeur of Herod’s subsequent Othello-like remorse (‘I’ll muffle up myself in endless night’, V.i.247) is rather punctured by his previous ‘idle’ fancy that Mariam’s head might somehow be magically restored to her living trunk!

The conclusion of the play, like each of its individual acts, is voiced by Cary’s chorus. If at different turns this dramatic body is found to contradict itself, misread and misrepresent situations and to express simple-minded aphorisms, it also enacts important textual functions in communicating the society’s schemes of cultural expectation, in provoking the reader to reassess the implications of the narrative to date and in exciting an awareness that the events have much wider repercussions in the political order and cultural narrative of the kingdom as a whole. Its continuing role in questioning and undermining the moral and political sympathies of the reader at strategic points in the narrative is emblematic of the larger undertaking of this carefully structured and often enigmatic text.

Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (written c. 1600)

For many generations of readers and audiences *Hamlet* represents the most familiar point of contact with Shakespeare’s work. It was entered in the Stationers’ Register in July 1602 but is thought to have been composed in or about the year 1600. Written in the same period as *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* stands at the beginning of the central phase (1600–8) of Shakespeare’s career as a dramatist which was predominantly focused upon tragic writing and would include *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Before considering the dynamics of the play itself, it is worth pondering a moment to reflect upon



2.18 Copy of a drawing of the Swan Theatre originally made in 1596 by Johannes De Witt.

the difficulties associated with the shaping of the play in modern times. The first text that we have of the tragedy ('First Quarto') dates from 1603 and it has been speculated that this is a text which had been pirated by those wishing to make a profit from the play's success or that it was an abridged version designed for touring. Here, for example, we have the Polonius character called Corumbis and Reynaldo called Montano; and there are scenes, such as a meeting between Gertrude and Horatio, which occur in no other version. The "enlarged" 'Second Quarto' (1604-5) is about 1,500 lines longer (totalling approximately 3,800 lines) and claims on its front page to be printed 'according to the true and perfect Coppie'. Certainly, features of this text have suggested to scholars that this version may be based on access to Shakespeare's own written copy ('foul papers') which no longer survives. The quarto texts might also be compared with the version available in the 1623 First Folio which is comparable in size to the 'Second Quarto'

but has over 200 lines not found in that earlier quarto. Many modern editions of the play draw upon both the 'Second Quarto' and the 'Folio' to yield the most "complete" *Hamlet*. However, it should be remembered that editions of *Hamlet* that we mostly study would require some five hours of performance in a modern theatre, whereas it has been estimated that the playing times in Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres would normally have been restricted to somewhere between two or three hours. It might also be added that even when we are armed with our 'enlarged' texts of the tragedy, we still know too little for many critics about the Gertrude-Hamlet relationship, the sovereignty of Old Hamlet, the processes of political succession in Denmark, the origins of the ghost and the veracity of Hamlet's memory, for example.

Whereas modern audiences unthinkingly associate the figure of Hamlet with Shakespeare's pen, those entering the theatre at the beginning of the seventeenth century to see the play for the first time may not have arrived at this opinion so readily. Thomas Nashe refers mysteriously in a preface